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The spring work is about over in the Shortgrass Country. Now is the opening of the season to start spraying and dusting and doctoring for internal and external parasites. Feed stores and wool commission houses will soon be running up some mighty handsome scores on drench orders and insecticides.

Like all ranch overhead, the cost per hand to make the stomach worms drowsy and frighten off the hornflies for a day or two is going to be expensive. But at whatever the price, the old cows have to be spared the strain from switching their tails and the mother ewes have to be protected, or there won't be any money around to keep pampering the cattle.

For some time, I've been experimenting here at the ranch by dusting various concentrations of dirt samples from the corrals mixed with talcum powders to see whether the pens where we've been spraying for so many years haven't become hot enough to break the horn flies into smaller swarms. Talcum powder has to be added, because it's highly unethical among us better range scientists to omit the inert ingredients.

I don't mind running the risk of being caught by a federal drug inspector for recycling corral dirt, but I am not about to take a chance of developing a livestock medicine without thinning it down with either well water or bath powders.

Last summer when the muffler rusted off our old sprayer motor, I discovered that the hornflies were more responsive to noise than they were frightened of being drowned in water and insecticide. Whether the pump was spraying or not, I began to see the flies moving off in big bunches. I thought at first maybe they were afraid that getting wet was going to give them a cold, but after trying a few dry runs with no water in the sprayer and the motor going full blast, I was convinced that it was the noise that was driving them away.

The long wet spell has turned my samples into mud clods. If odor means anything, I think I'm on the verge of producing my own fly killer. These modern day flies have an immunity to drugs that makes them tough to kill. But I have high hopes that the residue from so many years is going to pay off.